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C O N F I D E N T I A L TAIPEI 004356

SIPDIS

STATE PASS AIT/W, INR/EAP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2025

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SUBJECT: PRE-ELECTION SCENE SETTER: CHIAYI COUNTY

REF: TAIPEI 4158

Classified By: AIT ACTING DIRECTOR DAVID J. KEEGAN, REASON(S): 1.4(B/D)

1. (U) IN CHIAYI COUNTY FACTIONS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN STRONGER THAN PARTIES. SINCE THE LAST MAGISTERIAL ELECTION IN 2001, HOWEVER, THE DPP HAS MADE SUBSTANTIAL INROADS IN THE COUNTY. INCUMBENT MAGISTRATE CHEN MING-WEN, FORMER KMT -- NOW DPP MEMBER, SUCCEEDED IN THE 2001 ELECTION THROUGH THE PERSONAL HELP OF PRESIDENT CHEN. THE MAGISTRATE, IN FACT, ATTRIBUTES HIS 2001 VICTORY TO THE PERSONAL POPULARITY OF PRESIDENT CHEN, RATHER THAN TO VOTER SUPPORT FOR THE DPP.

2. (C) THROUGH HIS YEARS IN OFFICE, MAGISTRATE CHEN'S SUPPORT HAS CONSOLIDATED AMONG THE DPP. THE COUNTY DPP OFFICE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY WU HSI-LAI SAYS THERE IS NO QUESTION CHEN WILL BE RE-ELECTED. IN GENERAL, THE INCUMBENT MAY NOT BE THE PERFECT MAGISTRATE, BUT HIS IMAGE IS CLEAN AND HE HAS PROVIDED EXCELLENT SERVICES TO THE COMMUNITY. ALTHOUGH THE DPP ISLAND-WIDE IS STEEPED IN SCANDALS, THESE ARE OF NO CONCERN TO LOCALS, WHO, SAYS WU, ARE SUFFERING FROM A DISTINCTLY POOR ECONOMY AND MORE WORRIED ABOUT THEIR IMMEDIATE ECONOMIC PROSPECTS.

3. (C) ACCORDING TO CHEN KUO-YING, AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER TO THE DPP COUNTY OFFICE, THE MAGISTRATE'S FAILURE TO DEVELOP TOURISM IN THE CHIAYI AREA IS NOT NECESSARILY A PERSONAL FAILURE, BUT REALLY MORE THE RESULT OF AN ISLAND-WIDE ECONOMIC SLUMP AND THE VAST NUMBER OF BUSINESSES THAT HAVE MOVED OUT OF THE COUNTY TAKING RESOURCES THAT COULD HAVE ASSISTED IN COUNTY DEVELOPMENT. COUNTY VOTERS, SAYS CHEN, WILL NOT HOLD THAT AGAINST THE LOCAL MAGISTRATE AND THEY HAVE NO TIME TO WORRY ABOUT DPP SCANDALS.

4. (C) BOTH CITY AND COUNTY DPP OFFICIALS CLAIM THERE IS SIMPLY NO COMPETITION IN THE CHIAYI COUNTY MAGISTERIAL ELECTION. ACCORDING TO THE DPP, THE KMT CAME OUT WITH A CANDIDATE ONLY RECENTLY, WHOM IT HAD TO "DRAFT" INTO SERVICE, BECAUSE IT WAS UNABLE TO FIND ANYONE TO RUN IN AN ELECTION IT COULD NOT HOPE TO WIN.

5. (C) AIT/K WAS UNABLE TO CONTACT KMT COUNTY OFFICIALS DURING A VISIT TO THE LOCALE. HOWEVER, KMT OFFICIALS AT THE CITY OFFICE WOULDN'T EVEN COMMENT ON THE MAGISTERIAL RACE OR THE KMT CANDIDATE CHEN MING-CHENG, IMPLYING THE CHANCES FOR A COUNTY WIN WERE SO REMOTE THE MATTER WASN'T WORTH DISCUSSING.

IN FACT, WHEN ASKED TO SPECULATE ON KMT CHANCES IN THE COUNTY ELECTION, THE KMT CHAIRMAN DESPAIRINGLY PUT HIS FACE IN HIS HANDS AND JUST SHOOK HIS HEAD.

KEEGAN